

HILL

THE ~~MOUNTAIN~~ OF CALVARY WAS JERUSALEM'S EXECUTION HILL: THE PLACE ~~SET~~ ASIDE SPECI-
CIFICALLY FOR THE EXECUTION OF CRIMINALS. THE HEBREWS CALLED IT GALGOTHA WHICH MEANS
THE "PLACE OF THE SKULL." IT WAS ON THIS HILL THAT JESUS CHRIST ENDURED THE EXCRU-
TIATING
PAIN OF BEING NAILED TO A WOODEN CROSS, IT WAS THERE THAT HE SUFFERED FOR HOURS
AS HIS LIFE SLOWLY DRAINED AWAY--AND IT WAS THERE THAT HE DIED. ^{Members of} THE MORAVIAN CHURCH
(~~MEMBERS OF~~) USE AS THEIR STANDARD GREETING WHEN ENCOUNTERING A FELLOW MORAVIAN
"CHRIST IS RISEN" / THIS IS THE GLORIOUS NEWS THAT GIVES MEANING TO ALL OF JESUS LIFE:
BUT FREQUENTLY IN THE RELATION OF THIS FACT WE FAIL TO FULLY REALIZE THE HARSHNESS THAT
JESUS DIED, WAS CRUCIFIED IN THE MANNER OF A COMMON CRIMINAL.

WHILE SUFFERING ON THE CROSS JESUS UTTERED SEVEN DIFFERENT WORDS THAT HAVE BEEN
Memorialized IN GOOD FIRDAY SERMONS AND LENTEN MEDITATIONS. THERE WERE OTHERS ON CALVARY'S
HILL THAT AFTERNOON, NOT ONLY DID OUR LORD SPEAK TO AND ABOUT THEM FROM HIS CROSS, BUT
THEY ADDRESSED HIM AS THEY SPOKE TO THE CROSS. THE PEOPLE WHO SPOKE TO THE CROSS ARE
OF INTEREST TO US BECAUSE WHAT THEY SAID THAT DAY NOT ONLY DEPICTS THEIR INNER FEELINGS
AND ATTITUDES / BUT OURS AS WELL / BEGINNING THIS SUNDAY I WILL PREACH ON THESE WORDS TO
THE CROSS, THE SERIES WILL BE CONTINUED DURING OUR WEDNESDAY EVENING SERVICES ALSO.

LAST SUNDAY I URGED YOU TO ATTEMPT SOME SELF EXAMINATION. I HOPE YOU WILL CON-
TINUE TO DO SO THROUGHOUT THIS SERIES, SEEING IN THOSE WHO SPOKE TO THE CROSS-YOUR
SELVES: HEARING IN THEIR WORDS YOUR OWN.

THE WORD TO THE CROSS THAT I WANT TO EXAMINE THIS MORNING ISSUED FROM PEOPLE
 WHO WERE PASSING BY, PER HAPS THEY WERE JUST ^{CURIOUS} ~~ARMED~~ TRAVELERS. WHAT THEY SAID WAS "IF
YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS." THESE MEN THOUGHT THAT IF JESUS WAS
REALLY THE CHRIST HE WOULD SAVE HIMSELF: IF HE REALLY HAD THE POWER OF GOD HE WOULD
SURELY AVOID THIS SENSELESS SUFFERING. THEY COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF A DEVOTION TO GOD
THAT LOST ITSELF IN SACRIFICE, OF GIVING ITSELF AS A RANSOM, OF BEING UNABLE TO SAVE
ITSELF JUST BECAUSE OTHERS WERE BEING SAVED BY THAT INABILITY. THESE MEN WANTED A
CHRIST WITHOUT A CROSS, A RELIGION WITHOUT ANY SACRIFICE.

IN EXAMINING OURSELVES WE PLAINLY SEE THAT WE ALSO WANT A CHRIST WITHOUT A CROSS:
CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT SACRIFICE. WE WANT THE CHURCH, BUT NOT THE SACRIFICE IT REQUIRES
IN TERMS OF TIME AND TALENT: WE WANT ITS W~~OR~~SHIP BUT NOT ON A RAINY MORNING, WE WANT
THE CHURCH'S TEACHING FOR OUR CHILDREN BUT ONLY IF WE DO NOT OVERSLEEP. WE TOO SAY
TO JESUS - "COME DOWN" DON'T MAKE IT SO HARD FOR US BY DYING ON A CROSS."

JESUS MADE IT CLEAR THAT FOLLOWING HIM ENTAILS DISCIPLINE, AND THAT IT IS THE DISCIPLINE THAT MAKES A CHRISTIAN. IN ALL OF THE GOSPELS HE MAKES IT CLEAR TO HIS FOLLOWERS THAT THEY MUST MEET CERTAIN CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP. "IF ANY MAN WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME." / CONSIDER HOW MUCH EASIER IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR JESUS TO DIE ON CALVARY HAD HIS DISCIPLES UNDERSTOOD FULLY THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES. HOW MUCH EASIER IF PETER WOULD HAVE BEEN THERE TO SHOUT ABOVE THE CROWD "MASTER, WE ARE STILL HERE WITH YOU" OR IF THOMAS HAD BEEN THERE TO CRY OUT ABOVE THE LAUGHTER AND RICICULE "WE STILL BELIEVE YOU WILL WIN THE VICTORY." JESUS DIED NOT KNOWING WHETHER HIS DISCIPLES UNDERSTOOD HIM OR NOT, / WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN, WHEN IT CAME TIME TO TRULY SACRIFICE THEY HAD FLED. THE MEN WITH WHOM HE HAD SPENT ALL OF HIS TIME, WHO HE TAUGHT AND NURTURED WERE NOW HIDING WANDERING "WHY THIS SACRIFICE" WHY THIS SUFFERING" PERHAPS HE ISN'T THE CRHIST. HOW JESUS MUST HAVE LONGED FOR THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HIS DISCIPLES UNDERSTOOD. HOW HE MUST LONG FOR THE EVIDENCE THAT WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE REQUIREMENTS OF HIS GOSPEL.

THE WORD CROSS IS A DIFFICULT WORD TO UNDERSTAND TODAY. WE HAVE GIVEN THE NAME CROSS TO MANY THINGS THAT ARE NOT CROSSES AT ALL IN THE CHRISTIAN SENSE OF THE WORD. WE SPEAK OF A CLAMITY OR TRAGEDY AS A CROSS WE MUST BEAR: / WE CALL HEAVY BURDENS CROSSES.

WE SPEAK OF OUR HANDICAPS AS THE CROSS WE MUST CARRY. THERE ARE MANY MISFORTUNES THAT WE MUST PATIENTLY ENDURE BUT THIS IS NOT TAKING UP OUR CROSS.

THE CROSS FOR JESUS WAS HIS DELIBERATE CHOICE OF GIVING HIMSELF FOR OTHER PEOPLE. IT DID NOT MATTER WHAT IT COST HIM OR WHAT DISCIPLINE IT REQUIRED. FOR US TAKING UP THE CROSS ALSO MEANS THE DELIBERATE CHOICE TO TRY TO FOLLOW GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIVES, TO TAKE A STEP WE ARE UNDER NO COMPULSION TO TAKE, BUT TO ENTER FREELY: IT MEANS PUTTING OURSELVES WITHOUT RESERVATION AT THE SERVICE OF CHRIST: IT MEANS PUTTING OURSELVES IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST EVIL, WHATEVER THE COST.

WHEN WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO GOD, THERE IS DANGER, THE DANGER OF A CROSS, THE DANGER THAT LIFE WILL BE UPSET WITH THE BURDENS OF OTHERS, DANGER THAT WE WILL BE CALLED UPON TO SACRIFICE HERE AND THERE. JESUS DID NOT COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS, AND WHEN WE SHIRK, WHEN WE HESI TATE TO JOIN HIM IN SACRIFICE WE TOO ARE LIKE THE PASSERS BY ON CALVARY'S HILL.

IN A RECENT MAGAZINE ARTICLE ENTITLED "WHERE ARE THE ADDS OF YESTERDAY" THE AUTHOR PLEADS FOR THE RETURN OF SIMPLICITY AND THE LACK OF ADORNMENT THAT MARKED ADVERTISING IN FORMER YEARS. AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE HE CITES WHAT HE CALLS THE GREATEST AD OF ALL THINGS APPEARING LONG AGO IN THE LONDON TIMES. IT PROMPTED REPLIES FROM ALL OVER ENGLAND AND HAD NO CATCHY PICTURE OR TRICKY PHRASE. SIGNED BY AN ANTARTIC EXPLORER IT READ " MEN WANTED, MAJOR JOURNEY, LONG HOURS, CHALLENGING WORK, EXTREME

DANGER, POSSIBLE FAME. IT MIGHT WELL BE AN AD FOR CHRISTIANITY. JESUS NEVER MENTIONED ANYTHING ABOUT THE COMFORT OF CHRISTIAN LIVING, HE NEVER SAID THAT THE CHRISTIAN WILL ENJOY UNHEARD OF LUXURY, HE NEVER PROMISED RELIGION WITHOUT A CROSS, ~~HE NEVER~~ ~~PROMISED RELIGION WITHOUT A CROSS,~~ HE NEVER PROMISED A NEW LIFE WITHOUT SELF SACRIFICE AND DEVOTION.

AT THIS POINT LET US ASK THE QUESTION JESUS DISCIPLE ASKED "WHY THE CROSS IN THE FIRST PLACE." LET US JOIN THE PASSERS BY AND SAY " IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD COME DOWN FROM THAT CROSS."

IT IS GOD WHO GIVES US THE CROSS, AND THE CROSS WHICH GIVES US GOD.

AN 11TH CENTURY POET PICTURES GOD AS SITTING ON A MOUNTAIN, SMILING DOWN AT THE GRAVEST OFFENSES AND SINS OF MEN, REGARDING THEM AS NAUGHTY PUPPIES PLAYING ON THE GRASS BENEATH HIM. FOR FOR THIS MAN, GOD DOES NOT CARE, HE IS NOT DISTURBED BY THE WAY MEN LIVE. BUT GOD DOES CARE AND THE CROSS IS THE SUPREME EVIDENCE OF HIS CARRYING. THE DYING SAVIOR IS OUTRIGHT PROOF OF HOW MUCH GOD CARES AND HOW FAR HE IS WILLING TO GO TO REDEEM US. THE GERMAN WRITER GOETHE IN A MOMENT OF JEST ONCE SAID "IF I WERE GOD, THIS WORLD OF SIN WOULD BREAK MY HEART." IN THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST WE SEE THAT IT DID JUST THAT. IN THE CROSS WE SEE THAT GOD LOVES SO MUCH AND IS SO CONCERNED THAT HE WAS WILLING TO MAKE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE: HE WAS WILLING THAT THE

CHRIST MIGHT DIE, THAT WE MIGHT LIVE. THE CROSS IS THE LOVE OF GOD ENCIRCLING OUR WORLD OF SIN AND EVIL. JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS IS NOT SIMPLY A GOOD MAN THAT WAS KILLED IN A MOMENTOUS ERROR: RATHER HE IS THE INCARNATION OF ALMIGHTY GOD DYING TO RECONCILE MEN TO HIMSELF.

THE SINFUL NATURE OF MEN, OF YOU AND I, IS NOT EASILY HEALED: PRIDE, PREJUDICE AND INDIFFERENCE ARE SCARS THAT MARR US TO THE QUICK. AND SO NO CASUAL CURE COULD BE HAD. GOD IN JESUS CHRIST HAS PROVIDED THAT CURE: IN HIS DEATH WE SEE OUR OWN SIN REFLECTED: AND SIMULTANEOUSLY THE POSSIBILITY OF FORGIVENESS AND ETERNAL LIFE. IN THE CROSS WE SEE THAT SALVATION IS FREE, BUT WE ALSO SEE THAT IT WAS NOT CHEAP, NOT FOR GOD. JESUS FORTUNATELY DID NOT COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS, FORTUNATELY FOR US. AND WE IN TURN, IF WE ARE TO FOLLOW, MUST BE WILLING TO TAKE UP A CROSS OF OUR OWN.

IT IS BY LOSING ONE'S LIFE IN COMPLETE COMMITMENT TO CHRIST THAT ONE FINDS FULLNESS OF LIFE. THERE IS NO REAL RELIGION WITHOUT A CROSS, WITHOUT THE WILLING SURRENDER OF ALL OF LIFE. JESUS DELIBERATELY CHOSE THIS WAY, THE WAY OF THE CROSS. SPEAKING OF HIS OWN LIFE HE SAID " NO ONE TAKES IT FROM ME, BUT I LAY IT DOWN OF MY OWN ACCORD." IT MAY SEEM THAT MEN TOOK HIS LIFE BUT THIS IS NOT SO, HE SURRENDERED

IT WILLINGLY. AND IN THIS ~~HE~~ SURRENDER HE TURNED DEATH INTO LIFE. ON CALVARY JESUS

TURNED UPSIDE DOWN THE POPULAR NOTION THAT LIVING IS ENJOYING ALL THE LUXURIES MONEY CAN BUY. IN ITS PLACE HE SUBSTITUTED THE AMAZING PROPOSITION THAT THE WAY TO HAVE LIFE WAS TO LOSE IT IN COMMITMENT TO GOD AND TO FELLOWMAN. OF ALL THE PHRASES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT NONE IS MORE IMPORTANT THEAN "WHO EVER WOULD SAVE HIS LIFE WOULD LOSE IT, AND WHOEVER LOSES HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE WILL FIND IT" (MATT. 16:25) IF YOU WISH FOR HAPPINESS TRY SERVICE: IF YOU WANT THE CROWN OF JOY TAKE UP THE CROSS OF SACRIFICE.

NOW TO BE SURE THIS IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO DO IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE. AS CHRISTIANS WE ARE IN THE CURIOUS POSITION OF HAVING A RELIGION THAT IS CHARACTERIZED BY A CROSS, AND AT THE SAME TIME LIVING IN A WORLD THAT GOES ALL OUT TO RELIEVE THE SLIGHTEST BIT OF MISCOMFORT. TOO OFTEN OUR APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE IS IN THE PRAYER "I'LL GO WHERE YOU WANT ME TO GO, DEAR LORD, IF I CAN BE GUARANTEED THE COMFORTS I AM ACCUSTOMED TO" HOW OFTEN WE FEEL LIKE WE ARE REALLY LIVING IF WE HAVE JUST RECEIVED A BOOSTER IN SALARY, OR HAVE PURCHASED A NEW AUTOMOBILE. HOW FREQUENTLY OUR DEFINITION OF LIFE IS WRAPPED UP IN WHAT WE HAVE. AT TIMES WE DESERVE THE COMMENT OF THOMAS CARLYLE WHEN HE REMARKED OF HIS GENERATION "SOUL'S EXTINCT, STOMACH'S WELL ALIVE!"

A DYING LORD SHOWS US THAT THIS IS NOT LIFE, THIS IS JUST EXISTENCE. THE CROSS OF CALVARY POINTS TO A NEW LIFE, A REAL LIFE THAT MAY BE HAD WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THAT TO HAVE LIFE WE MUST LOSE IT.

IT WAS THE PASSERS BY THAT SAID TO JESUS, IF YOU ARE THE CHRIST, COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS. ARE WE PART OF THAT CROWD? ARE WE A PART OF THE NUMBER WHO DID NOT KNOW THE CHRIST, WHO DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHY HE WILLINGLY DIED THAT HORRIBLE DEATH? OUR REACTIONS ARE STIKINGLY SIMILAR TO THEIRS AT TIMES WHEN OUR FAITH MAKES DEMANDS ON US. "SURE I'M A CHRISTIAN" WE SAY, BUT DON'T PUSH ME: JUST DON'T ASK TOO MUCH OF ME." "DON'T TRY TO MAKE THIS SET OF BELIEFS HAVE ANY EFFECT ON THE WAY I LIVE."

THE NEW CREATION THAT I DESCRIBED LAST WEEK IS CHARACTERIZED MAINLY BY THIS REALIZATION, THAT THERE IS MORE TO EXISTENCE THAN GETTING AND BUYING, THAT TRUE JOY IS FOUND IN GIVING OF OUR SELVES, IN SACRIFICING OUR PERSONAL WHIMS AND DESIRES FOR A GREATER GOOD. A NEW BEING DOES NOT HIDE FROM SACRIFICE AND SELF NEGATION BUT GLADLY GIVES OF HIMSELF WHENEVER NEEDED. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THIS DOES NOT AVAIL ITSELF OPENLY TO US ALL, IT CAN COME ABOUT AS YOU STRUGGLE WITH A FRIEND IN NEED, SHARING HIS EVERY AGONY AND DISPAIR, IT CAN COME ABOUT WHEN YOU JOIN ANOTHER IN A TIME OF EXTREME JOY AND HAPPINESS, BEING HAPPY BECAUSE HE IS HAPPY. IT CAN BE THE SEEMINGLY SIMPLE TASK OF AN EXTRA HOUR^{OR} SO A WEEK DEVOTED TO THE MINISTRY OF YOUR CHURCH.

WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THE CHRIST OF CALVARY DOES NOT OFFER WELL BEING AND COMFORT.

THE MESSAGE THAT POURS FORTH FROM THAT MORBID PLACE OF EXECUTION IS A CALL FOR SACRIFICE.

WIF YOU WOULD COME AFTER ME, TAKE UP YOUR CROSS"

JESUS CHRIST DID NOT COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS--IF HE HAD WOULD YOU NOW BE A
CHRISTIAN? IF HE HAD AVOIDED THOE SACRIFICE WOULD THERE BE A CHURCH?

TO OUR PLEAS OF "COME DOWN" "DO NOT ASK US TO SACRIFICE" HE STRETCHES OUT A
HAND, A HAND DRIVEN THROUGH WITH A NAIL, A HAND STREAKED WITH BLOOD AND SAYS. I

HAVE DONE THIS FOR YOU, I HAVE DIED THAT YOU MIGHT LIVE, WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR ME? AMEN

PRAYER
 HYMN 22

→ AS WE SING TOGETHER THE HYMN OF PAGE 22 WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS LET US

THINK PARTICULARLY ABOUT THE WORDS OF THE LAST TWO VERSES:

"SEE FROM HIS HEAD, HIS HANDS, HIS FEET
 SORROW AND LOVE FLOW MINGLED DOWN:
 DID E'ER SUCH LOVE AND SORROW MEET,
 OR THORNS COMPOSE SO RICH A CROWN
 WERE THE WHOLE REALM OF NATURE MINE,
 THAT WERE A PRESENT FAR TOO SMALL,
 LOVE SA MAZING SO DIVINE
 DEMANDS MY SOUL, MY LIFE, MY ALL."